A Gift Of Bone



Kristopher Mallory

A Gift Of Bone

by

Kristopher Mallory

A Gift Of Bone

A NoSleep Short

Copyright



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A Gift Of Bone

eBook Edition
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Other Releases by Kristopher Mallory

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The Scarecrow Corpse

Attempted

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Another Small Burn

The Absinthe Smuggler

The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett

The Death Agreement

Mega Millions

These Bad Dreams Combined

I Know What They Are

Master Stargazer

What People Are Saying about Kris's Stories

The Death Agreement:

"Oftentimes, these no sleep series have humungous let-downs for endings. Not the case at all here. Bravo, sir." – *jerk--alert*

I Know What They Are:

"Brilliant. Everything came together at the end and I got chills as I finished it. Well done." – *Asaroki*

Master Stargazer:

"Hands down one of the best short sci fi books I have read, and I have read a lot." – *rickamente*

The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett:

"Quite a story, mixing snowy Christmas magic with delightfully dark humored chills." – *leavnsoon*

Special Thanks

To the postal workers.

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A Gift Of Bone

"…and the bones came together, bone to his bone."

~ Ezekiel 37:7

The phone call I just received was late, but it wasn't unexpected. As soon as I saw the area code, I knew who was calling, and I knew it was about the Gifter.

"Ten cities so far," the voice on the line said, "Bangor, Ft. Worth, Savannah, Denver, Sacramento, Detroit, Albany, Topeka, Biloxi, and… Little Rock."

"Distal phalanges?"

"Correct. How did you know?"

"Tips of the fingers, series of ten. Second set, right?"

"Yes. We would like you to come in."

"No."

"You know this case better than anyone."

"I'm retired."

"You can help us catch him this time. Come in as a consultant."

"No."

"They said you would refuse. I had to try."

"Understandable."

"Is there anything at all you can tell me that might have not been in the file? Anything?"

Of course there are things that are not in the file. Though the case was locked down and the general public never caught wind of the Gifter, there are parts of the case that even the government didn't need to be made aware of. Do I think any of those details are going to help?

"No. Good luck in catching him," I said as I hung up the phone.

I paced around the room for a good hour, wondering if I'd be left alone. I'm not a player any longer; I haven't been for decades. The case itself is well over 30 years old, so I shouldn't even fret about it. "He won't bother me," I say out loud. I should just grab my clubs and head out to the course for a round of golf and forget the phone ever rang. It probably isn't even the same person. It's a wonderful idea, but the problem is that I know I won't be left alone, and I know that it is the same person.

Thinking back, I can't recall the exact year, though I do remember… Six packages arrived in six different cities. In the box was a pink ribbon, which was wrapped around a tiny item that the receiver could not readily identify. Two of them contained a hammer-shaped item, two others contained an anvil-shaped item, and the last two contained a stirrup-shaped item.

Also in the box was a note. It read:

A GIFT OF BONE

They were indeed bones: the malleus, the incus, and the stapes, respectively. Together they form the series of bones in the left and right ears.

As strange as the contents of the packages were, stranger still was the choice of recipients. As it turns out, those six packages were all delivered to four previous and two current United States Congressmen. So if you are wondering why you haven't heard of this case before, any instances in which high-ranking government officers are witnesses or potential targets need to be kept quiet. The order was clear: no media coverage, no leaks, all related files are to be sealed, promptly convict in secret. That's just how these things work.

No one realized that it was just the beginning.

Finding the suspect proved to be difficult. No fingerprints. No hair or fiber samples. The return address was to a bogus, non-existent town in Nevada. The ink used to write the note was from a standard BIC or whatever was most popular back then. Even the handwriting analysis couldn't determine if a man or a woman wrote the notes, nor if that person was left- or right-handed. The ribbon was standard gift wrap sold all across the U.S. As for the bones, this was back before DNA testing; all we knew was the victim was a male between 18 and 35, so they could have been from anyone.

The next week, packages arrived in 10 more cities. A pink ribbon wrapped each of the bones, and the message was the same: A GIFT OF BONE. The recipients were all members of the local or state police force.

The bones were distal phalanges, or fingertips. A San Diego detective wasn't happy to have their investigations shut down.

The following week, the Gifter sent out 10 more, this time to firemen; the bones were distal phalanges of the toes. We still had no idea what we were dealing with. At the time, I knew nothing of anatomy, so I called in the medical guys and asked them a question.

"How many bones does a human skeleton have?"

"Normally 206," one of the doctors said.

I was shocked. It just isn't something people think about. The way things were going, it seemed like we would have 206 bones sent to anyone related to the authority. It seemed like a logical conclusion, but I would find out soon enough that was wrong.

Over the next six weeks, more packages came. The recipients were from a mixture of federal agencies: IRS, FDA, INS, SSA. Those are the ones I can remember, but I know there were more. In total, 29 packages went to the home addresses of people who were or had been working for those agencies, 28 of which were the proximal and intermediate phalanges of the hands and feet. The last one was a horseshoe-shaped bone found in the throat known as the hyoid.

Over the next three months, we saw a flurry of activity among the branches of the military. Seemingly random members of all ranks of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard received the package. 106 in total. One might think that would be a large portion of the skeleton, as it's over half the total number of bones; truth is, the calcaneus, talus, navicular, medial, intermediate & lateral cuneiforms, plus the cuboid and the metatarsals make up the bones of the feet, while the scaphoid, lunate, triquetrum, pisiform, trapezium, trapezoid, capitate, metacarpal bones make up the bones of the hands. The Gifter wasn't almost done… no, just warming up.

Tracking down the bones in the beginning was difficult. We would get a call or two transferred to us, and once we realized which area of government the receiver was in, we sent out notifications to people in the

same area to be on the lookout for anything out of the ordinary received via mail. Please remember that this was way before 9/11, so not everyone was apt to report a suspicious package. Obviously, the Gifter knew this. He decided to taunt us by helping us locate all of his “Gifts.”

The same week that the last of the military packages were sent, the head of our office received a package himself, but it was slightly different than the others. The package contained a list of addresses broken down by week. At this point, it’s been over five months, so there were 21 weeks listed, containing the addresses that had been mailed a bone to up until that point; 161 in total.

Also inside was a note:

A GIFT OF TEETH

Below it were 21 teeth, each wrapped in a pink ribbon.

I understood the message immediately and made a call back down to the medical guys. “How many teeth does an adult human have?” Answer: 32. The Gifter was giving us a timetable. Like everything else, though, the teeth themselves couldn’t tell us anything. Several of us were sent around the country to retrieve all of the unreported bones and packages. Never a mistake and never a deviation, perfectly methodical in execution.

Something unexpected happened the next week… the pattern broke. We got a call transferred to us from a guy with no known ties to the government. I flew out to Chicago to meet him personally. His package contained a tibia. I asked the man if he had any idea why he was targeted, to which he had no answer. There was nothing odd about him; he was just a hardworking blue-collar family man. I flew back to D.C. defeated. It was then that I knew we would never catch the Gifter.

The office got another letter, this time sent to a member of another department. Inside was a list of 6 addresses; one of them was of the man from Chicago. It would seem the Gifter was going to keep us up to date from now on. Inside was a single pink-ribbon-wrapped tooth and a note:

A GIFT OF TEETH

“It’s a tooth, not teeth, you asshole!” Though I knew he meant it to be included as part of the original set, which pretty much made me the asshole.

We sent out people to collect the other five bones for a total of two tibiae, two fibulae, and two patellae, the bones of the lower legs.

Other than the size of the boxes, nothing had changed. There was still the pink ribbon and the note: A GIFT OF BONE. We had no leads and no suspects. Since the packages were being sent nationwide, there was no way to predict whom the next round would go to, so we had to wait until we got a call or the next letter from the Gifter telling us where to look. And though we lost the government pattern, at least a new one was showing up… it appeared that the Gifter was breaking down the body from the extremities. Other than the ears and the bone in the neck, which seemed a bit random.

All in all we still had nothing. Thinking back, I wonder if anything would have changed if only I had shaken hands with the man in Chicago…

The following weeks were more of the same. Radius in Boston and Sacramento, Ulna in Louisville and Atlanta, Femur in Topeka and Salem, Humerus in Albuquerque and Boise, the arms and legs of a human being strewn out across a continent. Then he began to work on the head: 14 facial bones, mandible, maxilla, palatine, zygomatic, nasal, lacrimal, inferior conchae, and the vomer… for Christ’s sake, these names haunt my dreams. Of course someone new in our department received a letter and a tooth. All of it became so… ordinary.

Finally we figured out something interesting… We missed it at first because not all of the recipients were married; some were single, and others divorced (more than half were divorced two or three times). We discovered that each of the men was a father. What that meant was never made fully clear, but I have my suspicions. I wish I could say we had more to go on, but we were completely at the mercy of the Gifter.

Time went by and the 4 shoulder bones, scapula and clavicle, were sent. The eight cranial bones—the frontal, parietal, temporal, occipital, sphenoid, and ethmoid—scared the hell out of the science teachers they

were delivered to. Then the 4 pelvic bones, the sacrum, coccyx, and the os coxae or hipbone (which is actually the ilium, ischium, and pubis fused!), showed up on four huge ranches in Texas.

The 24 ribs of the thorax were a fun week for us. Those went to businessmen, a few of whom gave us a hard time about the gag order and almost leaked the story to the media. In fact, it is the only instance in which a bone wasn't recovered. The man from NYC claimed that the package never arrived, and though we believed him to be lying, there wasn't anything we could do about it… After that, more of the chest—the manubrium and xiphoid of the sternum—and, if memory serves, they were sent to priests somewhere in West Virginia. More teeth arrived for different people like clockwork; before we knew it, we realized that almost the entire skeleton was restored. The only thing missing was the 24 bones of the vertebral column, or the spine, if you will, and of course the lost rib.

The last tooth finally arrived at our office, and we found that the Gifter changed the game up again. This time there wasn't any list of addresses, just the tooth, the pink ribbon, and the note. All we could do was wait for the calls to start coming in, which, to our surprise, none did. Had something gone wrong? I couldn't help but worry. With nothing to go on, I decided to call it a night.

Upon arriving home, my wife (at the time) told me a deliveryman brought a package, and she had him leave it in the garage. It wasn't necessarily a crate, but it wasn't a small box either. I would say it weighed about 100 pounds at the most. Then I saw the return address… Destiny, Nevada…

An uneventful Friday suddenly transformed itself into the most terrifying day of my entire life. I had become a recipient of one of the Gifter's packages. My hands were shaking as I ripped the envelope from the staples on top of the box. Inside was a message unlike the rest:

A GIFT OF FLESH

Somehow I managed the nerve to open the top, and what I saw inside will haunt me forever.

We were wrong… how could we have been so wrong!

Inside was a mass of wrinkled, naked skin that was covered with scars… stitches both fresh and old. We had always assumed the Gifter was sending out parts of a long-dead man, but the truth was the man had been alive for at least 8 months as the Gifter methodically removed bones piece by piece before sewing him up and then working on another section while the last section had some time to heal. The pain, my god, I wonder how long someone could last before they died in the process. Though it still appeared to be fresh, the blob of a former man was horrifying to look at. The face sunk down at a disgusting angle. The arms and legs were braided together as if he were a pretzel. Since there weren't any ribs, the shapes of the organs could be seen just below the surface. I screamed for my wife to call my boss…

And that's it. There really isn't anything more. They showed up an hour later, dusted for prints, took some pictures, had my wife give them a statement, and then finally they sent someone to pick up the body. All of this is in the file. It's everything the government needed to know.

I resigned then and there.

But like I said, that wasn't all of it. What wasn't in the report was why the vertebrae weren't individually sent out like all of the other bones. I know the answer to that. Standing there in my garage, I wasn't just looking at a pile of meat; I was looking at a man. Since the ribs were gone and I could see the shape of the organs, what I saw… what I failed to tell anyone… was a beating heart.

God knows how, but he was still alive.

I whispered to him, asking if he could tell me who had done it… even though I knew that his hearing was the first thing taken. Then I reached down slowly and touched him. The eyes in the mass of what once was a head opened and rolled back, showing only the bloodshot whites. The mass shivered violently. He croaked out something, which sounded like a word… "deeeeesoneeeee"… That one thing, a single word, over and over again…

I stepped back in horror. All I could do was stare while it continued to speak… if you could call it that… I listened to him repeat it a few times before I was sure I had heard it right. He was saying Destiny, I was positive. “Destiny…” Thump-thump, I watched his heartbeat… “Destiny…” Thump-thump, “Destiny…” Then I saw the ring…

Suddenly I knew who he was and who the Gifter was sending bones to. The ring was a simple gold band with an interesting logo of a square and compasses with a capital ‘G’ in the center. Though not exact, it was very similar to the ring that I happened to be wearing.

It wasn’t difficult to hold the nose and mouth closed, considering the face had no bones in it. “Rest now,” I told him as the thing shook under my hands. As it struggled, some stitches stretched or ripped, which caused blood, veins, and muscle tissue to squeeze through. I stayed there, hands soaked red, gripping the loose flesh until the insanity drained from the eyes, the twitching went still, and I could no longer see the heart beating. I had killed the man, removed his ring, and cleaned myself up well before the team arrived.

Until now, I have never told a soul about what happened that evening. Why did I do it? Well, the truth is I was low in the organization; I had only recently joined, having been invited by one of my co-workers, but as soon as I saw the ring and understood what it meant, I knew that the Gifter was going to have to be handled internally.

What I realized was that all of those who received a bone, from the congressmen to the school teachers and businessmen, even the man in Chicago, were members of this organization, just as I was. So at that point there was no doubt in my mind that the upper echelon had already known who the recipients of the bones were for some time. They’ve managed to keep it under wraps, so it was my obligation to cover it up or hide any trace of their involvement.

Later on, when I returned the ring to a superior of this organization, the identity of the boneless man was revealed to me, but on the books, his identity was never discovered. No, I won’t say who it was. All that matters

is that he was a brother who suffered an unimaginable amount of pain and despair. That should be enough.

As you already know, neither the authorities nor this organization were ever able to catch the Gifter. He is still out there, and as we would later find out, others just as demented are out there too. As for the case, for many people involved it was just a crazy killing, so over the years it faded to obscurity, and after a time it was completely forgotten.

I never forgot, though. The boneless man in the box wouldn't let me. The memory of him kept me determined. Year by year, I quickly moved up in ranks within the organization, and one day I was invited to join the top. Secrets were revealed to me that had the potential to shatter society as we know it. Armed with this information and being in a position of power, a semi-secret task force was chartered to hunt down the Gifter and other "monsters" like him.

Some people pretend to be blind, but everyone knows deep down that something is wrong. You feel it in your… well, bones. For decades, strange, seemingly unreal, insane things have been going on. Though we've covered up and washed away a lifetime of blood, this plague still manages to make a subconscious impact on the public. We've made progress; many inhuman beasts have been put down, but they are formidable opponents. Despite our best efforts, more and more people are being blackmailed, tortured, and killed; the murder and suicide rate has never been higher. I fear that they may one day even outnumber us, but I digress…

Back to the case: What else can I say? It's all just speculation. Based on the fact that the bones went to organization members with children, we theorized that it was a warning that those kids would one day be targeted. Thirty-some years later, we can't say for sure if this was true, but the data shows a high percentage of those kids dying or disappearing under suspicious circumstances. My own daughter was struck by a hit-and-run driver several years ago. Luckily, she survived. Was it related? I think so.

The reason I've told you all this is that we believe you may have inadvertently caused him to resurface. It's possible that the victim may be a friend or a relative of yours. We have found a common thread between the recipients: They know you.

The Gifter needs to be stopped.

We failed before, but we live in a different world now. Technology has changed so much since the last time. As such, we believe it's time to break one of our founding rules by sharing this information with the public. Even so, due to the nature of our work, we must always maintain a level of anonymity, so I'm asking, begging, that you take this seriously. By sharing this, you can help put an end to this madness. It's been discussed, and we've determined that anything you put out on our behalf would provide us with a level of plausible deniability should our identities become known.

This is the message: What someone knows may put them in danger. Be wary of any packages received. If anyone finds a letter that says "A GIFT OF BONE," report it through here. If anyone knows of a doctor with a fondness for pink ribbons, make sure the information is shared. We will find it.

I know you've been through hell already, but you are in a unique position to help. Together we can end this.

Your father would have wanted it that way.

3.5.8.

THE END.



About the Author



Born near Baltimore, Maryland, Kris has been writing short fiction since he was a kid. First sharing his ramblings on Stealth Fiction and then on Reddit, where most of his stories were posted to r/nosleep. His stories have been featured on The NoSleep Podcast, Chilling Tales for Dark Nights, Tales to Terrify, and Horror on the Rocks. The recording of The Scarecrow Corpse, read by Markiplier, has been heard hundreds of thousands of times. He lives in Melbourne, Australia, with his wife. And occasionally, he turns into a strawberry.

More stories: StealthFiction.com

What's Next?

LET ME TELL YOU HOW I LOST MY EYES

A Short Story Collection by Sammy Fowler

Coming one day. Maybe. Probably not.

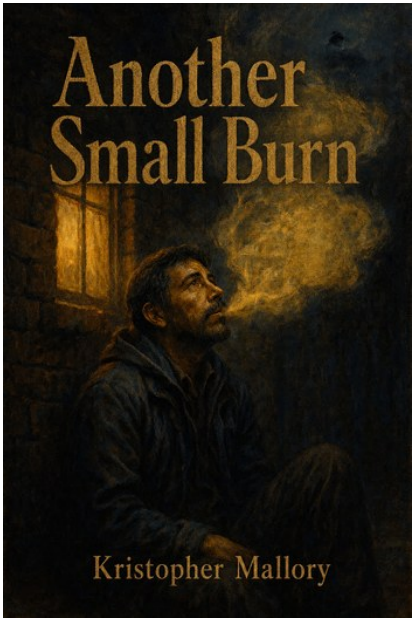
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Hear It Read Aloud

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More from Kristopher Mallory



ANOTHER SMALL BURN

This quiet horror short is now available on Amazon. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

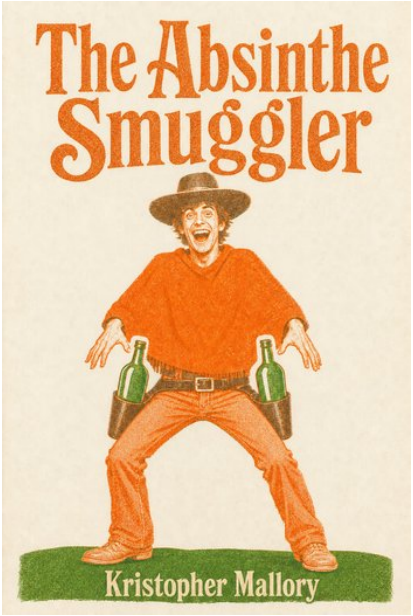
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Carlos can burn any memory into magic, the way everyone can now; the hard part is choosing which ones he can live without.

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Praise for Another Small Burn:

"That would make a fantastic Novella or novel, I was sad when it ended and wanted more." – *smoore*



THE ABSINTHE SMUGGLER

This comedy short is now available on Amazon. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

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A teenager on holiday in Madrid promises his friends two bottles of the green fairy, and customs turns out to be the easy part.
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THE SPECIAL CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS OF MR. EVERETT

This Christmas horror story is now available on Amazon. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

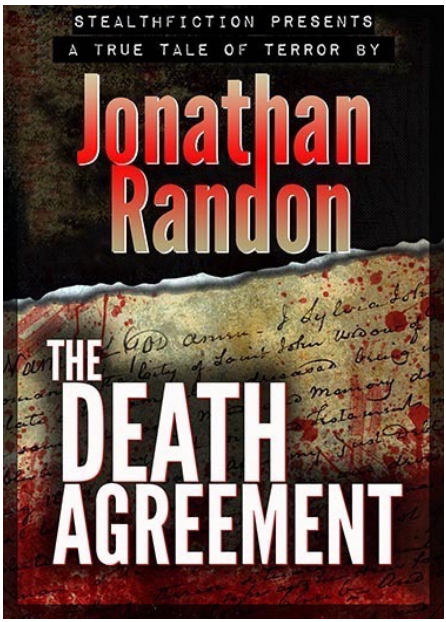
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Christmas Eve, a blizzard, and Hank agrees to sit with old Mr. Everett, twenty-two-time winner of the town's decoration contest, who insists he is not going crazy.

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Praise for The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett:

"Quite a story, mixing snowy Christmas magic with delightfully dark humored chills." – *leavnsoon*



THE DEATH AGREEMENT

This horror novella is now available. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

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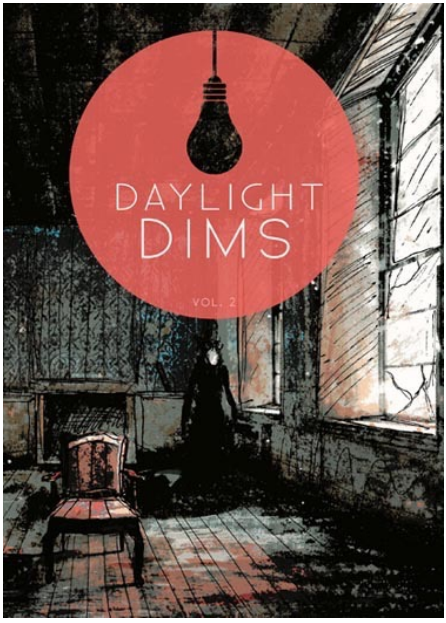
We made a pact. He lived up to his end by dying. I tried to live up to my end by following The Death Agreement.

What you will find within these pages is a true recounting of a man's life as seen through my eyes. It's almost an impossible task when some of what you see can't be real and what is real you may refuse to see… My name is Jon Randon and I'm going to tell you a story.

Praise for The Death Agreement:

"This was one of the best things I've ever read." – *GrandMoffJed*
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More from Stealth Fiction



DAYLIGHT DIMS
VOLUME TWO

This horror anthology is now available. For more information on this book, please visit the Daylight Dims website.

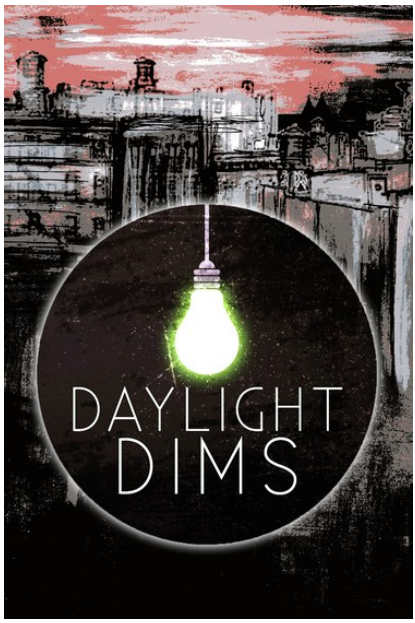
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Darkness descends again. Daylight Dims Volume Two features thirteen stories that cross the genres of surreal, dark fantasy, and heart-pounding dread. This annual horror anthology is guaranteed to twist your perception of horror. From the common, comfortable tropes to the more taboo, these handpicked tales have a literary aspect designed to showcase what true horror can be.

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Praise for Daylight Dims Vol. 2:

“This was probably one of the most entertaining collections of horror stories I've ever read. And I don't say this to suck up or to stroke any tail feathers. I was happy to have the opportunity to read through this before release, and I implore anyone on the fence about picking this up to do themselves a favor and take the plunge into the abyss. You will not be disappointed.” – *Human Gravy*



DAYLIGHT DIMS

VOLUME ONE

Second Edition — now with two new stories from the editors.

This horror anthology is now available. For more information on this book, please visit the Daylight Dims website.

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The editors chose 13 stories from over 100 premium submissions. DD contains some of the best horror around.

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Praise for Daylight Dims:

"This is a fantastic horror anthology. All 13 stories are exquisite. The book was not what I expected initially, as I thought that it might be all vampire or werewolf tales. Not so! These are original stories from authors of the macabre. From dark fantasy and pure suspense to classic horror tales, it shows the extraordinary scope of fantastical fright fiction. The stories in this anthology are a tour de force of fear, which will haunt you, terrify you, and stay with you." – S. Mahaffey, *"neverjudge"*